



Coping with Stress

When stress exceeds your ability to cope, normal tasks can feel overwhelming. The goal of this article is to help you become mindful of barriers to moderating stress and shift to constructive action. Remember, stress is neither good nor bad, it's a natural reaction to your environment.

1. Be aware of current coping habits.

When pressured, some people fill their schedules with social activities in an attempt to avoid facing problems. Others deal with stress by withdrawing from friends and family. A person might also turn to alcohol, junk food, or other unhealthy activities to help them escape stress. While another tells themselves they are a victim of bad circumstances, thinking things like "I shouldn't have to deal with this". Be conscious of how you currently deal with stressful situations. Acknowledge your previous reactions to stress by learning to take mindful steps and working on positive stress release tactics.

2. Identify ways you think yourself to higher levels of stress.

Stress is a feeling: it isn't something that happens to you, but rather how you think about what is or has happened. Take a step back and reflect: Are your thoughts making situations worse? Do you feel you have to be perfect and everything is of critical importance? Simply put, stressful thoughts add to real life pressures. Work at adopting more moderate views. Put stressful situations in perspective. Is every problem absolutely urgent? Are these things I have to do by myself or would it be better to ask for help? What is one small thing I can do today to help alleviate my worries?

3. Ask yourself: What specific problems or conflicts are troubling and which problems can I effectively tackle?

It's okay to acknowledge your distress. Don't ignore it. Think about when, and why, you feel stressed. Then, rather than focusing on how to cope with a number of issues, narrow your list down to what you feel is manageable. Are there issues that are out of your control? If so, eliminate stressors that cannot be solved by you alone. Focus on tasks or stressors for which you are able to make a difference. Taking small steps and handling manageable tasks will help you to feel accomplished and effect positive change in your daily life.

4. Increase your ability to cope with stress.

An active and balanced lifestyle is your best defense against stress.

Stress experts recommend the following:

- Avoid using alcohol, caffeine or nicotine as a means of alleviating stress.
- Exercise regularly or take a 20-minute walk to dissipate stress and lift your mood.
- Eat well-balanced, nutritious meals and avoid processed foods.
- Reduce consumption of refined sugars, which cause frequent fluctuation in blood glucose levels, increasing your stress.
- Practice relaxation daily. Try deep breathing, yoga, meditation, imagery, listening to quiet music, or enjoying nature.
- Keep to a sleep schedule and get 7-8 hours of rest nightly.
- Release tension or worry by sharing your feelings with a close friend, family member, or counselor.

In the future, make a point to turn these practices into coping mechanisms. If you've had a bad day, pick something off this list to do for yourself before that day is over.

5. Practice deep breathing.

Give your mind and body a moment, absent of stress by practicing slow, deep breathing.

Close your eyes and inhale slowly and deeply through your nose (approx. 7 seconds), then exhale slowly through your mouth (approx. 8 seconds). If you prefer, say a soothing word or phrase as you exhale like "relax" or "I can do this". Do this for 5 minutes, 3 times a day. This technique, known as the "relaxation response," will quiet thoughts, lower your heart rate, and bring respiration back to normal.

Another quick, but great technique for when you feel stiff is to: close your eyes, roll your head in a circle- twice clockwise and twice counterclockwise, then take a breath in, clench all of your muscles for 5 seconds, and release your breath while focusing on relaxing your muscles beginning with your toes all the way up through the body.

When should I seek professional help?

If you notice persistent feelings of distress or hopelessness and you feel like you are barely able to get through your daily responsibilities and activities, consult with a licensed mental health professional. Counselors are trained to help people address emotional reactions to disaster such as disbelief, stress, anxiety, and grief and make a plan for moving forward.

How The Lexington Group Can Help

The Lexington Group can help set up confidential Online or Face-to-Face Counseling.

Request service and find out additional information at: **The-Lexington-Group.com**

For 24/7 support call:

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1-800-676-4357

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